

Dottie Harper Park sits on land originally tamed by Homer Crosby, who came to the Highline area in February, 1907. Crosby laid down “Crosby Road” (S.W. 146<sup>th</sup> Street today) from Ambaum to First Avenue South. Crosby also helped build Ambaum Road, from White Center to Des Moines, in 1909 using donkey engines. ([Our Burien](#))

Dottie Harper Park lies between the Burien Public Library and Community Center. It houses an art gallery operated by the Burien Arts Association, a local non-profit organization. The Park contains several second-growth firs, play equipment and a fire ring and trail, and is the site of the annual Burien Strawberry and Arts Festival.

The park is heavily forested, mainly with mature second-growth Douglas fir, with a few scattered cedars, hemlocks and native hardwoods. The understory consists of sword ferns, salal, snowberry, Indian plum, oceanspray, red elderberry, Oregon grape and other native species. The park provides a place for interpretation of the ecosystems in an urban forest, and for passive recreation such as strolling, picnicking and wildlife viewing. It is within walking distance of hundreds of apartment units and single-family homes.

Artwork pieces by world-renowned artist and sculptor Richard Beyer also function as play elements in the park. ([Dottie Harper Park Site Assessment Report](#), MAKERS Architecture & Urban Design, Nakano Dennis Landscape Architects, Urban Forestry Services, Inc., December 8, 1998) Beyer is the creator of more than 75 commissioned sculptures spread throughout the world. His work "Waiting for the Interurban," in Fremont, is probably Seattle's most popular piece of public art. Beyer's works in stone, bronze, aluminum, brick and wood adorn and enliven many public places, including four bas-relief panels in Des Moines City Hall (1982), and the intriguing bronze sculpture "The Big Catch" (you have to see it for yourself) in Des Moines City Park (1994).

Other artists have also used Dottie Harper Park to create and display outdoor exhibits—some of them interactive—in conjunction with the Burien Strawberry & Arts Festival and other local events. (“From the Ground Up,” [Seattle Times](#), June 2007)

Dottie Harper, whom the Seattle Times called Burien's “Betsy Ross, chief promoter, publicity agent, school and civic planner and representative,” was a community activist, member of the State Arts Commission, King County Arts Commission and Historic Preservation Board, co-chairman of the Seahurst Park Committee, chairman of the Burien Bi-centennial Committee, city of Burien Councilmember and Chairman of its Arts Committee. All such activity was a voluntary, full-time pursuit.

As a young woman, Dottie attended a missionary school in Shanghai—her father was a Marine Corps officer—and high school and college in California. She excelled in arts and crafts at San Diego State College, receiving so many requests to design and sew clothing that she went into business for herself.

Dottie and her husband Paul, whom she met during World War II, settled near Lake Burien in 1949 after moving from Renton. Mrs. Harper worked with park boards to create more small parks, helping to get a park bond passed which funded Bill Moshier (and Angle Lake) Park. She led the fight to save Miller Creek from uncontrolled Highway 509 construction, helped found Highline Community College and the community's first arts

gallery. The Gallery was fashioned from an “old house” on a wooded parcel next to the King County Library, aided by local business contributions and labor. A classroom was set up in the basement and the converted two-car garage served as a work studio. In addition to displaying artwork, the gallery also offers a “backyard stage” extending into Dottie Harper Park, on which various theater groups perform on summer evenings.

Across the street was the old Chelsea Park Elementary School, closed due to declining enrollment. Dottie eyed it as a possible site for the proposed Burien Community Art Center. The Cornish summer school for the deaf was already operating there. “We plan continuing college courses—credit and non-credit,” Harper said. “We hope to build a small theater and museum next to the Burien Library, on the other side of the park.”

“When does she find time for sewing now, between rearing four children, doing her own housework, running from meeting to meeting and working at the gallery?” asked Janice Krenmayr in her Seattle Times article of September 12, 1976. . . .

In the early 1970s, the landscape architect planning King County Park #10, as it was called, asked Northwest artist and sculptor Richard Beyer to design playground equipment and a sculpture. The main piece is a large cedar “old growth” stump from Snohomish County, signifying the Northwest's vanishing virgin forests. Beyer cleaned it and, adding more cedar pieces, carved life-sized figures (“some appearing much like the people in the Fremont figures”) encircling its base, “dancing to bring it back to life.” (The Art People Love: Stories of Richard S. Beyer's Life and His Sculpture, Margaret W. Beyer, Washington State University Press, 1999, p. 43)

A unique drinking fountain was also made by running plumbing through a huge granite boulder, with a sculpted frog adorning the spigot. Small buffaloes made of laminated hardwood and mounted on pipes stood nearby, ready for children to ride. There was also a mathematical game with pebbles in carved cups in a cedar log. As of 1999, all of the pieces except the stump were deteriorated or in need of refurbishing. The cedar stump remained intact and “polished” from more than 25 years of children climbing on it.

On March 10, 1994 the deed for Burien Park, as it was known, was given to the city of Burien by King County (“North 3 ½ Acres of East 7 acres of SE ¼ of the NW ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 19, Township 23 North, Range 4 East, W.M.”). In 1995 the Burien City Council, recognizing Dottie Harper as “a guiding light in promoting parks, arts, recreation, and cultural programs” in Burien, passed an ordinance officially designating the 4.5-acre parcel on the S.W. corner of 146<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> S.W. as Dottie Harper Park. (City of Burien Ordinance No. 138, May 22, 1995)

“Burien Park” was officially renamed “Dottie Harper Park” in a ceremony on July 1, 1995 at the Burien Arts Gallery. (City of Burien Press Release, June 26, 1995)

The Burien Arts Gallery in Dottie Harper Park is a gathering point for the arts of the greater Burien area. In addition to the annual Arts Festival, the Gallery assists in the development of cultural aspects of the community, promoting dance, painting, sculpting, ceramics, weaving, ballet, creative activities for children, acting, singing, youth and adult symphony, literary arts, book reviews, poetry, flower arranging, local history and

exhibits, nature and the cultivation of creative talents.

An all-volunteer operation, the Gallery primarily displays and sells the works of local artists. The basement of the main building and the adjoining building (formerly a garage) are used as classrooms and workshops to promote the creative arts. The annual Strawberry & Arts Festival often attracts more than 4,000 visitors, providing entertainment, refreshments and interaction with local artists and vendors. (Undated memorandum from Burien Arts Gallery Citizens Committee)

While the park and art gallery have held up reasonably well, the December 15, 2006 windstorm did inflict severe damage to the park, uprooting trees, leaving others dangerously leaning and damaging park fixtures.